

2

The God Who Sees Our Losses

Sometimes our losses go unnoticed. We may minimize the reality of the losses we experience. We may also deny that losses have an emotional impact on us. Or, it may be that we are aware of our loss and the emotional pain that accompanies it, but others do not notice. Other people may downplay the significance of our losses or discount the pain we feel.

For grief to lead to healing and spiritual growth, our losses need to be identified and acknowledged. We need to pay attention to the losses we have experienced. And, we need someone other than ourselves to pay attention as well.

The Bible teaches that God pays attention to our losses. He does not minimize them or deny their reality.

☐ Personal Reflection _____

1. Think of a time when you minimized the significance of a loss you

experienced. What happened as a result?

2. What experiences have you had of other people minimizing your grief during a time of loss?

How did this effect you?

☐ Bible Study _____

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026 with funding from
CLIR DHC Grant 2026-2028

<https://archive.org/details/2174.06.17>

his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' "

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (Mark 5:21-34)

1. What insights did you gain during your time of personal reflection?

2. This story shows Jesus' response to two people who had experienced losses. What do we know about the two people and about their losses?

3. What is it about chronic problems or losses like the women in this

story experienced that makes them more difficult for us to pay attention to?

4. How does Jesus respond to these people who are in grief?

5. What positive impact do you think Jesus' attention might have had on the woman as she trembled with fear?

6. What thoughts and feelings do you have as you see Jesus' response to these two people who are grieving?

7. Imagine for a moment that you are the woman in this story. Your efforts to get help for your illness have led to more suffering, not less.

You feel lost in the crowd, unworthy of notice. You know that Jesus is on the way to take care of something very important, but you have just enough faith to reach out to touch Jesus as he passes. When you do, you feel yourself being healed. Jesus stops abruptly. He asks the fifty people crowded around him "who touched me?" You sense their confusion. You are afraid. But you tell Jesus what has happened. Listen to what he says: "Your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

What are your thoughts and feelings as you imagine yourself in this story?

8. We often experience God's attentiveness to us through other people who care for us. How has the attentiveness of another person been helpful as you recover from loss?

☐ Prayer

What loss do you need God to pay attention to?

Grief makes it possible for us to face the painful reality of our losses, incorporate those losses into our understanding of life and somehow move on. The purpose of grief is not to help us to forget what we have lost, but to help us grow in understanding, compassion and courage in the midst of our losses.

We all know that grief is emotionally painful work. Grief allows us to heal and to grow, but the cost in emotional energy is often very high. Because of this, we often seek ways to postpone the disciplines of grief. We may tell ourselves: "Look on the bright side." Or, "Keep a smile on your face." But attempts to avoid the emotionally painful process of grief do not lead to growth. In writing about the grief after a death, John Bowlby says:

For mourning to have a favorable outcome it appears to be necessary for a bereaved person to endure this buffeting of emotion. Only if he can tolerate the pining . . . the seemingly endless examination of how and why the loss occurred, and the anger at anyone who might have been responsible . . . can he come gradually to recognize and accept that the loss is in truth permanent and that his life must be shaped anew.¹

People who are doing the emotionally painful work of grief need friends who will follow the biblical injunction: "Mourn with those who mourn." And, they need to experience afresh the comforting presence of Jesus who is a "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief."

Our prayer is that in studying these texts you will experience God's comforting presence in your life as he gives you the strength to grieve your losses. "Blessed are those who mourn," Jesus said, "for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

May your roots sink deeply in the soil of God's love.

Dale and Juanita Ryan

¹John Bowlby, *Loss* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1980) p. 93.

1 The God Who Grieves

Most of us find it difficult to give ourselves permission to grieve. We are disappointed that it takes us so long to adapt to losses. We are distressed that the emotions involved are so painful. We feel that we should be able to handle it better. We wonder if something is wrong with us.

And we wonder about God. Is God also disappointed by our grief? Does he think we should be over this by now? Will he be distressed that our faith hasn't made us immune to pain? Will he dismiss our pain as faithlessness and say, "Pull yourself together"? Does God understand the process of grief?

It may come as a shock to those of us who have trouble grieving to learn that God grieves. The biblical text for this discussion illustrates that Jesus, who is God with us, wept over the death of his friend and grieved over Jerusalem. The God of the Bible is a God who has himself experienced grief. Out of his personal experience of the pain of grief he is prepared to help us as we grieve.

May focusing on God's grief help you to continue your own process of recovery from loss.

☐ Personal Reflection

1. What physical responses have you experienced in times of grief?

2. What have your emotional responses been in times of grief?

3. What have your spiritual responses been in times of grief?

☐ Bible Study

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" (John 11:33-36)

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone

those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34)

1. What insights did you gain during your time of personal reflection?

2. John 11:33-36 describes Jesus' reaction to Mary when she tells him of the death of her brother, and Luke 13:34 describes his sorrow when he is rejected by the people of Jerusalem. How does Jesus' expression of grief in these two stories compare to your own experiences of grief?

3. The focus of Jesus' grief in the passage from John is the death of someone he loved. What, in your experience, is it like to grieve over the loss of someone you love?

4. People interpreted Jesus' weeping as a sign of his love. How do we normally interpret public weeping?

5. Grief is an appropriate response to death. Grief is also an appropriate response to any loss. What is the focus of Jesus' grief in the passage from Luke?

6. In your experience, what is it like to grieve over unfulfilled hopes as Jesus did?

7. What thoughts and feelings do you have as you think about Jesus grieving?

8. How does it help your recovery from loss to know that God grieves?

☐ Prayer

What would you like to say today to the God who has experienced grief?

You feel lost in the crowd, unworthy of notice. You know that Jesus is on the way to take care of something very important, but you have just enough faith to reach out to touch Jesus as he passes. When you do, you feel yourself being healed. Jesus stops abruptly. He asks the fifty people crowded around him "who touched me?" You sense their confusion. You are afraid. But you tell Jesus what has happened. Listen to what he says: "Your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

What are your thoughts and feelings as you imagine yourself in this story?

8. We often experience God's attentiveness to us through other people who care for us. How has the attentiveness of another person been helpful as you recover from loss?

☐ Prayer

What loss do you need God to pay attention to?

3 The God Who Hears Us When We Are Depressed

Loss can threaten our identity, our self-esteem and our hope for future happiness. Threats of this kind can result in depression. This may seem obvious, but for most of us it is a difficult reality to accept. It is difficult because depression is uncomfortable for us. It is disruptive to our lives. It is often characterized by crying, disrupted sleep patterns, changes in appetite, social withdrawal, significant spiritual distress and a deep longing for the return of what was lost.

We tend to see depression as a sign either of personal weakness or of spiritual failure. We do not like the way it interferes with our ability to concentrate or to be productive.

How God responds to us when we are depressed is quite important. If he accepts us when we are depressed, then we can cry out to him and expect him to respond. We can tell him about our loss and about our sorrow. If God understands and accepts us when we are depressed, we may be able to find the courage to continue the painful work of grief.

☐ Personal Reflection _____

1. What effect does depression have on the way you think and feel about yourself?

2. What has been most helpful to you in times of depression?

☐ Bible Study _____

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

My tears have been my food day and night,
while men say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go with the multitude,
leading the procession to the house of God,

with shouts of joy and thanksgiving
among the festive throng.

Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.
By day the LORD directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”
My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:1-4, 7-11)

1. What insights did you gain during your time of personal reflection?

2. What signs of depression does the author exhibit?
3. Which of these symptoms are the most difficult for you to accept in yourself?
4. What seems to be the loss that triggered the author's depression?
5. The author seems confused about his relationship with God. What evidence do you see of this confusion?

6. How might depression following a loss lead to this kind of spiritual turmoil?
7. In the midst of his spiritual turmoil, the author is able to talk to God about his feelings of depression. When you are depressed, what is difficult about prayer?
8. How might it be helpful to you to know that God will listen to you and accept you when you are depressed?
9. How can other people be helpful to you when you are depressed and sorrowing over a loss?

☐ Prayer _____

What would you like to say to the God who accepts you when you are depressed?

4

The God Who Loves Us When We Feel Afraid

Fear is one of the most unpleasant emotions that we experience as a part of grief. The experience of loss can create fear in at least two ways. First, an experience of loss creates a sense of immediate danger. We may fear for our well-being or safety. Second, an experience of loss often creates uncertainty about the future. We may fear that other losses will come.

Like depression, fear is seen by many Christians as a kind of spiritual failure. We may hear from others or say to ourselves, "I shouldn't be afraid. I should trust God." Unfortunately, these "shoulds" often create additional fears. We fear that God will reject us because we are afraid. In addition to the initial loss, we must now deal with the complication of perceived losses in our relationship with God.

Fortunately, the Bible is quite straightforward about fear. God knows about our fears. He does not reject us when we are afraid. He is not shocked by our fears. He is not ashamed of us when we are afraid. God still seeks us out, hears our prayers and chooses us to be his people. Even when we are afraid.

Lenten Series...

"Healing Distorted Images of God"

Wednesday's 7:00 p.m.

Too often we see the God of the Bible through distorted lenses. This study will help us examine our existing images and meditate on more positive images of God found in scripture.

March 3, 1993 Distortion 1:

.... "The God of Impossible Expectations"

March 10, 1993 Distortion 2:

.... "The Emotionally Distant God"

March 17, 1993 Distortion 3:

.... "The Disinterested God"

March 24, 1993 Distortion 4:

.... "The Abusive God"

March 31, 1993 Distortion 5:

.... "The Unreliable God"

April 7, 1993 Distortion 6:

.... "The God Who Abandons"

**Covenant Metropolitan
Community Church**
...corner of 30st. &
4th. ave. s.



...for more information call 326-8529...

T led by Rev. Marge Ragona

☐ Prayer

What would you like to say to the God who accepts you when you are depressed?

4

The God Who Loves Us When We Feel Afraid

Fear is one of the most unpleasant emotions that we experience as a part of grief. The experience of loss can create fear in at least two ways. First, an experience of loss creates a sense of immediate danger. We may fear for our well-being or safety. Second, an experience of loss often creates uncertainty about the future. We may fear that other losses will come.

Like depression, fear is seen by many Christians as a kind of spiritual failure. We may hear from others or say to ourselves, "I shouldn't be afraid. I should trust God." Unfortunately, these "shoulds" often create additional fears. We fear that God will reject us because we are afraid. In addition to the initial loss, we must now deal with the complication of perceived losses in our relationship with God.

Fortunately, the Bible is quite straightforward about fear. God knows about our fears. He does not reject us when we are afraid. He is not shocked by our fears. He is not ashamed of us when we are afraid. God still seeks us out, hears our prayers and chooses us to be his people. Even when we are afraid.

☐ Personal Reflection

1. Think of a loss which you have experienced. What threats of present or future harm did you perceive in this loss?

2. What helped you when you were afraid?

☐ Bible Study

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the

tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. (Mark 16:1-8)

1. What insights did you gain during your time of personal reflection?

2. What losses had these women experienced?

3. What do you imagine they were thinking and feeling on their way to the tomb?

4. In the midst of their grief, they found two unexpected things. First, the stone, which was the focus of their concern, was already rolled away. And, second, a young man commissions them to inform the rest of Jesus' followers of his resurrection. Why do you think

the women responded with fear to these unexpected events?

5. How did the women behave when they were afraid?

6. How does the way the women's fear is described compare with the way you have experienced fear in times of loss?

7. What has been helpful to you when you experience fear in response to loss?

8. Imagine for a moment that God has entrusted you with something which is very important to him. You tremble. You are bewildered. You are afraid. The outcome of your struggle is not at all certain. You prepare yourself to run. You wonder, "Why didn't God entrust this to someone less susceptible to fear?" Reflect for a few moments on the fact that God has a long history of entrusting important tasks to people who struggle with fear.

What thoughts and feelings did you have during this meditation?

☐ Prayer

What do you want to say to the God who accepts you when you are afraid?

